

AFGHANISTAN: QUESTIONING THE FUTURE

Overview

Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a momentous accord in Geneva on April 14, 1988. The terms of the accord, guaranteed by the United States and the Soviet Union provided for the withdrawal of 115,000 Soviet troops from Afghanistan by February 15, 1989. Both the Iran based and the Pakistan based resistance parties, also called the mujaheddin, have been fighting the Kabul regime since 1979. The Pakistan based resistance has been provided military aid by the United States via Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's intelligence bureau. The mujaheddin have formed an interim government based in Pakistan, which has been officially recognized by United States and Pakistan. The U.S. intelligence community initially estimated that the Kabul regime would fall 6 to 12 months after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. However, these estimates are now being questioned -- the resistance groups have been unable to take Jalalabad, a major city controlled by the Kabul regime, in spite of engaging in a four-month siege of that city. The UN has specially appointed Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan as the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance to Afghanistan. He is responsible for the supervision of the UN's efforts to repatriate refugees and reconstruct the economy. The Coordinator has organized six factfinding missions to Afghanistan to assess the situation. The U.S. has provided bilateral humanitarian assistance for refugee camps in Pakistan and for cross-border programs from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

*** The Reconstruction of Afghanistan**

Afghanistan (1987 population: 14.7 million) has historically been one of the world's poorest nations; the war has shattered an already fragile economy. Two million people have fled their homes to other places within Afghanistan; 7 million have crossed the border to Pakistan and Iran. Estimates of deaths due to the war range between 500,000 and 1.3 million. As the war continues, refugee camps in Pakistan are overflowing with its victims. This year, in the months of March and April, 25,000 new refugees arrived in Pakistan.

When the refugees begin to return to Afghanistan, adequate health facilities, education, food and water will have to be provided. Animal breeding and poultry farming have come to a standstill and the lack of fields under cultivation is causing a food shortage. Afghanistan has little medical infrastructure and inadequate sanitation and water. There are at least fifteen types of antipersonnel mines and five types of antitank explosives deployed throughout the country, posing a grave threat to the safety of its inhabitants. The costs of reconstruction will be high. Roads, bridges and villages will have to be reconstructed. Between 12,000 and 22,000 villages have been destroyed or abandoned. The Afghans will also need seeds and agricultural equipment. The UN estimates that, for the repatriation of 3 million refugees alone, \$325.53 million will be required. Some have suggested that over \$1.5 billion will be required in the first four years of reconstruction alone.

The UN coordinated program headed by Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan, has been made responsible for the task of reconstruction. The Soviet Union has agreed to give the UN \$600 million for this purpose. Japan has pledged \$60 million. However, the United States has donated only \$17 million. Some critics have suggested that the U.S. should support the UN strongly in its efforts to make the aid venture truly international and neutral. The continuing war prevents the U.N. and the private voluntary organizations from implementing their plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

*** Women and Children**

In 1985, Afghanistan had the highest infant mortality rate (173 per thousand) and the highest under five mortality rate (304 per thousand) in the world. The literacy rate for women is eight percent. The 6.8 million children under the age of 16 in Afghanistan make up almost half the total

population. Some of the underlying causes behind these statistics are primitive educational and health facilities, inadequate drinking water, malnutrition, and high maternal mortality.

There are 5 million women and children refugees in Pakistan, comprising 70% percent of the refugee population. Life in a refugee camp is especially hard for a woman because the system of purdah (the tradition of veiling women when they step outside the home) forces her to be confined in the cramped quarters of a mud hut all day. In pre-war Afghanistan, life was easier because the houses are generally built around a spacious courtyard and there were other female relatives at home. Also, in the camps, there are few female medical personnel and inadequate medical facilities for women.

In Afghanistan, the situation is desperate. The fundamentalist mujaheddin, at times, have not permitted female medical personnel to work in Afghanistan, which effectively prevented women from receiving medical care. Some medical workers have estimated that 90% of the women suffer from depression or some other form of mental disease. Two American nurses, who worked in the Paktia province, reported that 110 to 150 women and children came to their clinics for treatment everyday. Many of these women and children had walked for a day and a half to reach the clinic. Malnutrition is common among the children and many of the women suffer from diseases beyond treatment, including uterine and ovarian cancers. Women in their twenties have high blood pressure. Respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, malaria and skin diseases are also common.

Due to the war, middle-class women have been forced to take those jobs in hospitals and schools that the soldiers of war would have otherwise occupied. They have been educated, have discarded their veils and adopted Western customs. The Communists advocate a more visible role for women in this traditional Muslim society. Many women oppose a fundamentalist Islamic order, fearing that the mujaheddin will force them to revert to traditional Islamic strictures. Religious laws would keep women confined to their homes, veiled and uneducated.

* Nature of Government:

Now that the Soviets have withdrawn their troops, it is expected that the nature of government within Afghanistan will change. The mujahedeens are divided into several parties based in Iran and Pakistan. The interim government formed by the seven party alliance in Peshawar, Pakistan has been recognized by Pakistan and the United States. Sibghatullah Mojaddidi, a moderate, has been elected to the largely ceremonial post of the President while Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a hard-line fundamentalist, was appointed Prime Minister.

The mujaheddin's ability to form a stable and unified government has been questioned by some scholars and the media. The guerrillas are divided into 13 separate political groups, two branches of the muslim faith -- Shi'ite and Sunni muslims -- and several ethnicities. The Pakistan based alliance, which is supplied with military aid from the U.S., consists of seven Sunni muslim groups, three of which are fundamentalist while four are traditionalist. The traditionalist groups believe that religion and state are separate, while the fundamentalists want to rule the country by the Koran. The interim government, formed by this alliance, does not have any representation from Shi'ite muslims who form 15 to 20% of the population in Afghanistan, nor has it been endorsed by the Shi'ite resistance groups in Iran. The local commanders based within Afghanistan are dissatisfied with the decisions of the Pakistan based alliance and the interim government. Even some major resistance groups within Pakistan are unhappy about the composition of the interim government. Scholars such as Selig Harrison, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggest that after the war, the country may be divided into regions controlled by local commanders on lines of ethnicity, tribe or religion.

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the communist party headed by Najibullah, currently controls most of the major cities in Afghanistan. Soviet troops, having invaded Afghanistan in 1979, supported the current regime against the mujaheddins until their withdrawal in February 1989. A proposal calling for a broad-based government is being promoted by UN Under-Secretary General Diego Cordovez. It envisages a transitional "National Government

for Peace and Reconstruction" composed of reputable Afghans not connected with any factions. Within six months, the government would convene a *Loi Jirga* or traditional tribal assembly empowered to constitute a new government. The proposal has received support from the field commanders (who receive arms from the alliance based in Peshawar, Pakistan), Zahir Shah (the king deposed in 1973) and some nationalists within the Peshawar alliance. The Soviet Union has agreed to support the proposal, provided anti-Soviet Islamic fundamentalists are barred from important positions. However, the fundamentalists have rejected it.

* The Mujaheddin:

The mujaheddin, although supported by Pakistan and the U.S., are losing the popular support of the Afghans themselves. The Pakistan based mujaheddin have lost popularity with the Afghans due to reports of drug trafficking and blackmarketing in American aid weapons. In a poll cited by Scig Harrison in his testimony to a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee in June 1989, over 70% of the refugees polled in Pakistan wanted Zahir Shah to lead the government. Individual resistance leaders polled one percent or less.

A number of the major resistance leaders want to keep the Afghan women in purdah and are outspokenly anti-Western. The Financial Times (23 June, 1989) stated that fundamentalist resistance leader Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami (allotted 25% of the total U.S. weapons supply by Pakistan) has been accused of throwing acid in women's faces for not wearing the veil in mid-1970s.

In violation of the Geneva accords, both the Soviet Union and the US have been supplying military aid to the Kabul regime and the mujaheddins respectively. Press reports assert that Soviet built Scud missiles and Antonov cargo planes (flying at altitudes well above the U.S. Stinger missile's maximum range) have inflicted considerable injuries on the mujaheddin in their attempt to take Jalalabad. Recently, the Kabul regime has scored some military victories against the mujaheddin. Since 1979, the U.S. has channelled over \$2 billion to the resistance through the CIA, most of it in weapons. The Soviets had provided the Kabul regime with \$1.6 billion in military aid between 1979 and 1986. This year, they have been giving Kabul defense equipment valued between \$200 to \$300 million a month.

* U.S. Policy in Afghanistan:

Since 1979, the U.S. government has spent over \$761.5 million for Afghan relief. Most of this support has been for the refugee camps in Pakistan (\$600 million) and for cross-border operations through private voluntary organizations. It has been alleged that the U.S. has pressured UN authorities into considering the mujaheddin fighters who often cross the border as refugees, thus, giving them the relief aid that refugees normally receive. In FY 89, the U.S. allocated \$95 million for its cross-border humanitarian program and \$55 million to UNHCR (High Commissioner on Refugees), largely in food aid. The U.S. has deliberately channelled most of the cross-border aid through the seven party alliance in Pakistan. Also, the Foreign Assistance Act includes a provision that bars expenditure of emergency refugee funds through the "Soviet controlled government of Afghanistan."

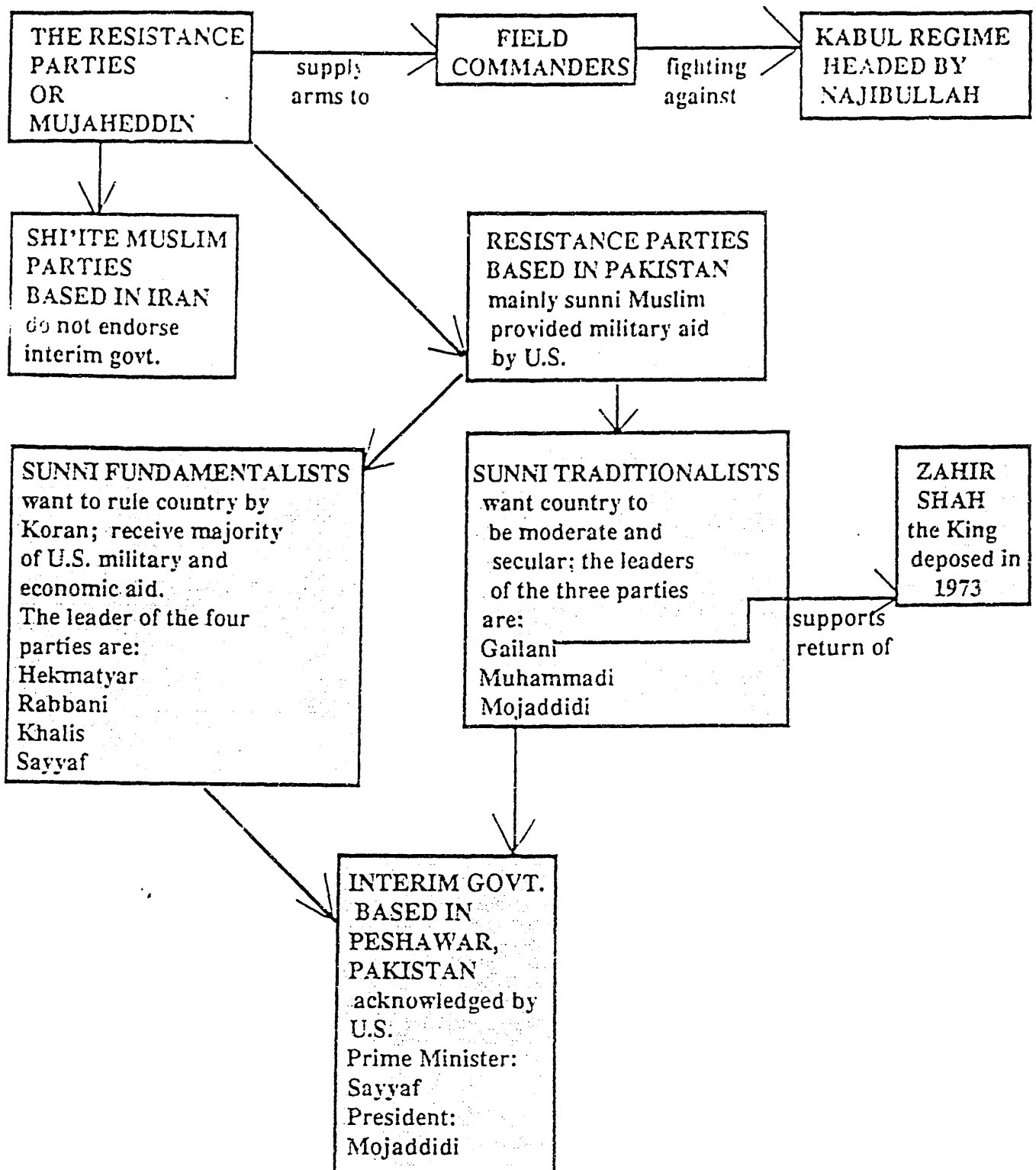
The U.S. supports the Pakistan based alliance and recognizes the interim government as the future government of Afghanistan. In a recent hearing, a State Department official stated that "the U.S. continues to support the right of the Afghan people to self-determination." However, the mujaheddin are rapidly losing popularity among the Afghans. Also, the press has consistently reported that anti-American sentiment is growing as more U.S. supplied missiles replace Soviet weapons as the killer of civilians.

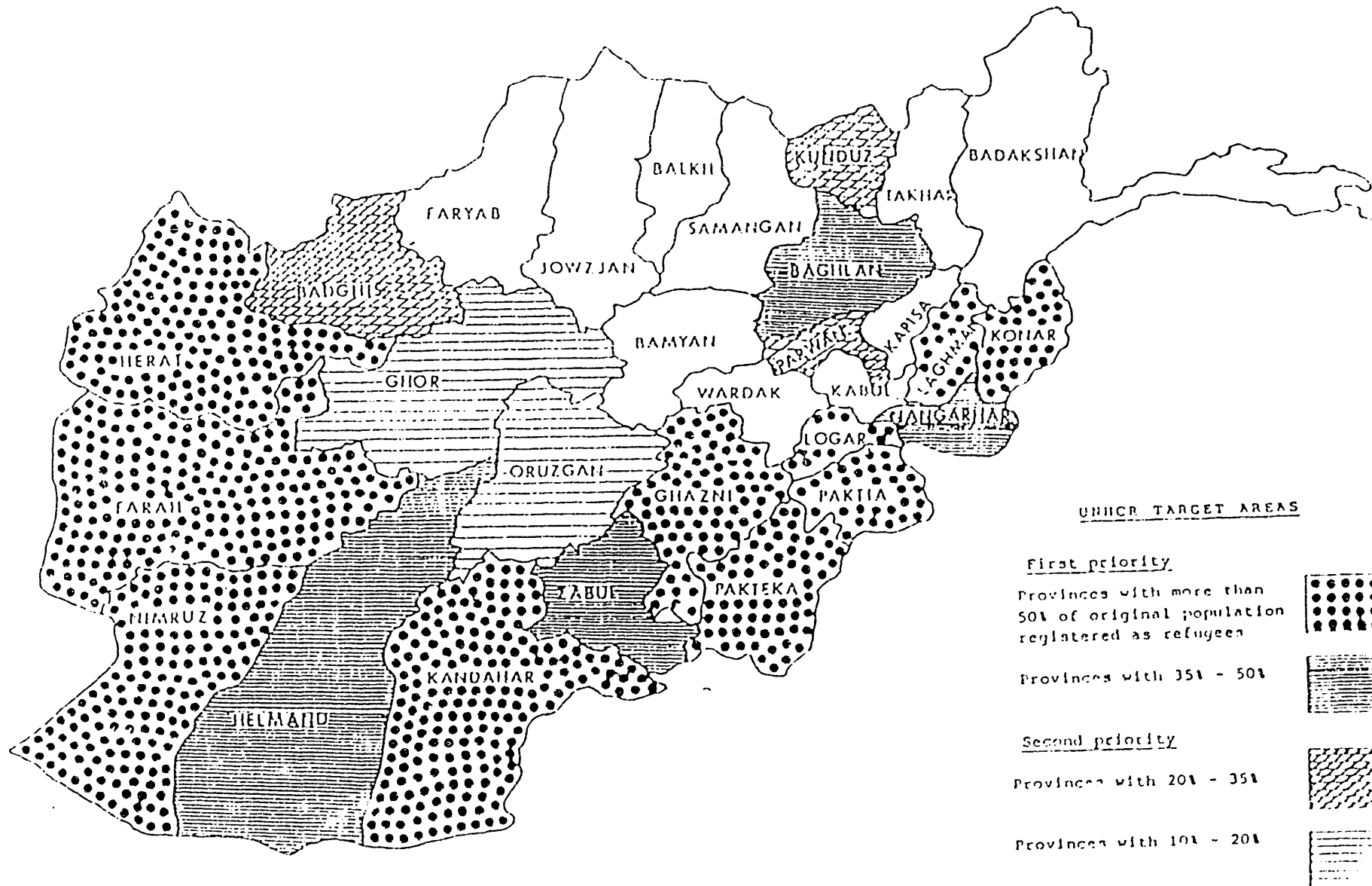
The U.S. has channelled weapons and ammunition to the mujaheddin through Pakistan's ISI. It has been asserted that ISI has deliberately channelled most weapons to those groups in the alliance that are fundamentalist. In 1975, these groups fled to Pakistan and linked with ISI when they were persecuted by Zahir Shah's successor, Mohammed Daud. Pakistan's approach to funnelling military aid to the mujaheddin has also been influenced by a desire to prevent the formation of a Pashtun

government in Afghanistan because of historical differences with the Pashtun tribe. Thus, ISI has channelled most military aid to Hekmatyar and Rabbani whose groups are fundamentalist and ironically, anti-American. Hekmatyar's party is now considered to be one of the most well-equipped and disciplined parties in the alliance. The appointment of the new envoy Peter Tomsen, who will communicate directly with the mujaheddin, instead of through the ISI, may signal a change in U.S. policy.

7/26/89

NATURE OF GOVERNMENT





This map represents the 14 priority provinces targeted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for reconstruction and development based on the criterion of number of refugees in the province.